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# Hidden Treasure: In Bangladesh, Worms Help Improve Nutrition through Better Homestead Gardens

by **SPRING/Bangladesh**

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Photo credit: SPRING/Bangladesh

Sefali Begum prepares the vermicomposting bed for her successful homestead garden in Barisal, Bangladesh.

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**“My garden’s vegetables are very tasty and the neighbors are very interested in having vegetables like them. Vermicomposting has helped me produce more from my vegetable garden.”**

**- Sefali Begum, FNS graduate**

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Sefali Begum was happy to start a homestead garden at her home in Barisal to feed her family more nutritious vegetables. Since her husband is a carpenter who leaves their home every day in the early morning and returns very late in the evening, Sefali is left with the responsibility of caring for her two sons, whose nutritional demands are increasing. But getting vegetables to grow in her garden proved more difficult than she expected.

Interested to get better results, she decided to start using chemical fertilizers. The situation did not improve, unfortunately, due to a lack of knowledge about the right amount of fertilizer that needs to be applied. Chemical fertilizers can be hazardous and are expensive; even when Sefali could afford them, she did not apply them properly, which meant that most of the vegetables she produced rotted. Frustrated by the expense of the fertilizer and her poor results, she lost interest in the garden.

Later, after becoming a participant in the local Farmer Nutrition School (FNS), managed by the USAID-funded Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project, Sefali and the other FNS participants learned about vermicomposting as part of their vegetable production for improved nutrition session. This modern waste management method can be easily managed at the household level, using earthworms to turn organic waste into high-quality compost. When vermicompost is added to

soil, it boosts the nutrients available to the plants and enhances the soil structure and drainage, resulting in healthier crops and increased yields.

Sefali decided to give the garden another try using this natural fertilizer with the help of the SPRING Union Facilitator, who showed her how to collect the worms. Before long, Sefali had a bountiful garden full of diverse crops, including red amaranth, pumpkin, bottle gourd, okra, green amaranth, and Indian spinach.

Now Sefali feeds her family fresh, nutritious vegetables and sells the excess produce to buy protein-rich eggs and fish. This is exactly the result she had hoped for and that her family needed.

Sefali's neighbors were amazed to see her garden grow so successfully. She gave them advice on the vermicomposting method and watched as they began using the technique at their own households.

Sefali Begum is one of more than 125,000 women who have benefitted from more than 6,400 SPRING Farmer Nutrition Schools across 40 *upazilas* in Barisal and Khulna since May 2012.

SPRING/Bangladesh facilitates social and behavior



Photo credit: SPRING/Bangladesh

Sefali Begum gathers vegetables in her bountiful garden.

change to prevent stunting in young children by focusing on nutrition during the critical "1,000 days" window from pregnancy to two years of age.

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